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The Disciplinary Value of Modern Language Teaching.

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Considering the importance given to language study in the high-school curriculum, the languages seem to possess an extraordinary cultural and disciplinary value.

Although I am convinced of the value of a person who knows several languages I am convinced, too, that technical ability, even of the highest order, amounts to very little when compared with the ability of thinking independently, that is with the ability of dealing rapidly with new situations and conditions, of grasping the essence of the new phenomena and meeting them successfully. The mere practical man, that is the one who knows how to do everything except to think independently, will always occupy a secondary position. This applies to the knowledge of languages, whose only purpose is to communicate thoughts, and whose value stands in direct ratio to the value of these thoughts.

I am certain that many of us know persons who have a surprising knowledge of languages and yet are not able to think logically nor do they show a greater intelligence than the average. Faraday, one of the greatest scientists and discoverers, knew only English and a little French.

A banality does not cease to be one, because it is possible to express it in six different languages; and a tedious person is just as much a bore in English or French as he is in German. Lagarde ridicules the Cardinal Mezzofanti, saying that he was able to say nothing in 58 languages.

Absolutely nothing gives us a right to assert that the knowledge of a foreign language increases the mental faculties, and in spite of this, we overburden our pupils with such barren and dry work as Latin is.

Such conditions could only arise and still hold true when no criticism was allowed, or even was considered a crime. Because five hundred years ago all the scientific books were written in Latin, and because the Church, which had founded the schools, necessarily needed a common language for teaching, our children are compelled to study Latin. It still has a place in our high-school studies due to the law of inertia and because we are afraid of doing away with this remainder of the Middle Ages.

And let us be honest. How do our pupils learn a language? Any traveling or business man could learn German or French or Spanish in one-tenth of the time that it takes the average high school pupil. Our traditional grammatical method prevents us from getting better results. If we would spend only one-tenth of the time which we are now using in acquiring the language, in reading good translations of the best German and French authors, our pupils would learn a hundred times more of the character and the customs of the different peoples, than through the pe-

dantic and dull study of languages, which make our schools the home of tedium and inertia. "Translation cannot take the place of the original" is the claim. But how many of those who speak this way have read Ibsen, Tolstoy, Dostojewski, Björnson or Gorki in the original? And for all that these men have experienced a deep influence over the world; and we may safely say, still more in those countries, where they have been read in translations, than in their own country, where they could be read in the original.

The development of the faculty of logical and independent thinking is the most important aim of pedagogy. Mathematics and Physics give this opportunity, as far as every mathematical result is the logical consequence of a given supposition, as far as every phenomenon of nature is the necessary consequence of a law of nature; history, too, as far as it gives the historical events not as mere facts, but as the necessary consequences of physical, geographical and psychological character.

If it is possible to prove that language study accustoms the pupil to scientific thinking, that the declensions and conjugations, the analyzing of sentences, the systematical study and drill of grammar rules, in sentences specially manufactured for this purpose, are a most powerful means of education, then we may admit its importance in our course of study.

To prove that the study of a foreign language has formal or disciplinary value it is necessary to recognize the fact

1st, that it conveys ideas of ethical and esthetic character.

2nd, that it promotes the faculty of thinking, especially of scientific or logical thinking.

1. The way in which a people forms its ethical concepts or ideas, gives us an unfailing means for measuring the depth or shallowness of its ethical conceptions. For example the original meaning of the German word "Arbeit" was toil, hardship, trouble; that is, that of the old Germans, the idea of work was not an ethical ennobling activity. The Latin word "matrimonium" tells us that the Roman judged matrimony purely by its sexual ends and did not have an idea of our ideal of relation between husband and wife.

By means of revealing the relations between the form and the ethical idea it involves, we study at the same time the ethical conception of the people whose language we learn, and in this manner we help to form ethical concepts. This means that from the historical study of a language we obtain the understanding for the ethical concepts and their development. Every one knows that a systematic treatment of this kind is impossible in a high school.

Some enthusiastic adherents of the classical languages indulge in curious mistakes. They seem to think that some of our young students consciously compare the Latin forms with the English or see in the inflec-

tional forms of the Greek language the expression of the noble Greek spirit. They forget that the interest for an abstract study of languages does not exist in these years.

2. From the time of the Humanists up to our day, a considerable amount of energy and erudition has gone to waste in trying to prove that the teaching of languages, and mainly the teaching of Latin, is specially apt to promote the ability to think logically.

What do we mean by thinking logically? We mean: "Combine two or more concepts in such a way that this combination is felt as absolutely necessary." Necessity and universal applicability are the characteristics of logical thinking. But there is no logic in that part of a language which is only concerned with the outer form of words and sentences. There is only logic in the science of languages, and as we do not have the time to study a language from its historical point of view, the study is useless. The teaching of languages could serve in the same way, as the teaching of physics for example, for the development of the power of logical thinking, if in the high school we could present the facts from an historical point of view, giving the different forms as a necessary result of physiological and psychological laws.

The systematic grammar presents all the phenomena as simple facts, classifying them in a purely arbitrary manner, which has absolutely nothing to do with their inner meaning, or with the logical side of language. This classification has for its sole practical purpose to make language study easier.

It is often very hard to realize how unsettled grammar is. Professor Henry Sweet of Oxford once read a paper on grammar in which he advanced the view that *cannon* in *cannon-ball* was not an adjective. When he had finished his paper an English philologist, who was also a teacher, got up and told him that his criticisms were superfluous, as no practical teacher possessed of common sense would think of calling *cannon* in *cannon-ball* an adjective. Thereupon another eminent philologist, who was not only a school-master, but had written an English grammar, got up, and to the intense amusement of the meeting maintained that *cannon* in *cannon-ball* was an adjective and nothing else; and although he refused to commit himself to a comparison *cannoner*, *cannonest*, he found another speaker to support him.

Again one would imagine that if anything in grammar is perfectly clear, it is the function of the prepositions; and yet referring to different grammars they give definitions which directly contradict each other. All the definitions insist on the prefixing of the preposition, although a preposition that follows its noun-word is as much a preposition as one that precedes it.

In German all nouns are written with capitals. The question now is: What is a noun? According to grammar: a noun is the name for a person, thing or idea. But according to this all the personal pronouns, which denote persons or things, are nouns and should be written with capitals.

Verbs are those words which tell us what a person or thing does, undergoes or suffers. In the sentence: the man has been punished for the forging of a check, the word *forging* tells us what the man has done, but it is not a verb.

Some verbs, which are united with two objects, admit a double passive. I may say: "The soldier was promised a considerable reward", or "A considerable reward was promised to the soldier." But is it possible to say instead of: "I described the engine to the captain,"—"The captain was described the engine"? or for "I brought the vegetables to my mother," "My mother was brought the vegetables"?

The development of logical reasoning is expected in a still higher degree from the systematic comparison of the different forms of language with those of our mother tongue; that is through the exercises of translation.

Here lies according to the teachers of classical languages the core and the real efflorescence of all mental culture. Let us examine these assertions.

The pupil who speaks his mother tongue unconsciously, does not know anything about the so-called grammatical categories. He has therefore to *learn* first the grammatical relations and their uses. For example:

Nom. der Mann — pater.

Gen. des Mannes — patris.

ich gebe, 1st Person Present.

du gabst, 2nd Person Imperfect, etc.

I cannot see how these exercises should give opportunity for any sort of logical combinations. The grammatical categories have absolutely nothing to do with the essence of language itself; they are not, like the philosophizing grammarians of olden days used to think, based on the nature of language. They are nothing but abstractions, established by common agreement and entirely accidental. The fact that French has more tenses than Latin, and the knowledge of these tenses can not be inferred logically but must simply be learned. The same is the case with their use. The grammatical terms are here the main thing; they are the means by which the pupil relates the forms of the foreign tongue to those of his mother tongue.

Each language develops according to its own psychological laws, and it is sheer nonsense to expect that the pupil who ignores the forms and the words of a foreign language should be able to deduce logically these forms and words from those of his mother tongue. They have simply to be learned by heart. If a pupil translates the nominative *father* by *patrem*,

if he puts *domavit* for *domuit*, or if he picks out of the seven French forms the wrong one (*elle, ils, elles, la, les, eux, vous*) for the German pronoun *sie*, which often happens, then he is not necessarily a dunce, he is only ignorant. His mistake lies not in the inability to think logically, he only has forgotten some of the innumerable rules and exceptions. We have not to forget that the laws of language and the laws of reasoning are two entirely different things. A grammatically correct sentence may express the greatest logical nonsense; at the same time it is possible to represent a logically significant and irrefutable matter in a form which is full of grammatical mistakes.

I cannot see how it could be possible to develop by means of the study of the linguistic forms logical thinking.

I certainly do not advocate the exclusion of modern languages from a high school course; but our method of teaching should have a more practical end in view. Foreign languages are extremely useful, and their knowledge signifies an immense advantage, in the domain of science, industry, technical and social organizations as well as to the business man who has to deal with foreign countries.

Berichte und Notizen.

I. Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Nationalen Deutschamerikanischen Lehrerseminars, Milwaukee, während des Schuljahres 1914—1915.

Wir stehen am Ende einer siebenunddreissigjährigen Tätigkeit des Lehrerseminars. Am 18. Juni wurde das 37. Schuljahr mit der Entlassungsfeier der Abiturienten geschlossen, und es wurde 15 jungen Leuten, 4 jungen Männern und 11 Mädchen, nach abgelegter Prüfung das Zeugnis der Reife erteilt. Gleichfalls erhielten 9 Schüler der vor drei Jahren eingerichteten Vorbereitungsabteilung die Berechtigung zum Eintritt in die Seminarabteilung. Es ist dies die erste Klasse, die aus der Vorbereitungsabteilung ins Seminar übergeht.

In der am 22. Juni abgehaltenen Generalversammlung des Seminarvereins wurden die folgenden Herren in den Verwaltungsrat gewählt: Dr. Louis Haupt, New York; J. H. Henke, Evansville, Ind.; Dr. J. C. Hexamer, Philadelphia; Dr. Ohas. L. Kissling, Milwaukee; Martin Schmidhofer, Chicago, und Robert Wild, Milwaukee.

Ausser den regelmässigen Schülern hatten wir drei Hospitanten, die bereits Lehrertifikate besaßen, von denen sich aber zwei noch weiter im Deutschen, einer im Englischen ausbilden wollten.

Die letztgenannte Tatsache führte dazu, dass der Vollzugsausschuss der Tätigkeit des Seminars ein weiteres Feld eröffnete, indem er den Direktor autorisierte, einen besonderen einjährigen Kursus für Lehrer des Deutschen oder Inhaber eines Diplomes von einer Normalschule oder einem College einzurichten. Der Zweck dieses Kurses ist, den Teilnehmern die Vorteile, die dem Seminar seinen Charakter verleihen, angedeihen zu lassen.